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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

More on Acid and Alkaline Foods

A radio talk by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NEC stations, Wednesday, January 24, 1934.

How do you do, Everybody:

Well, you Farm and Home Hour listeners have certainly given me the surprise of my life. Of course, I know that everybody wants the latest scientific facts about diet and everybody wants to know what foods to eat to keep healthy. But I just wasn't prepared for all your questions about the foods that have an acid and an alkaline reaction in the body. So please forgive me if I seem slow in answering your letters. We're mailing the list out to you as fast as we can. So just give us a little more time, and we'll get it to you. It was just the irony of fate that when we should be trying to help you to avoid colds, one of my assistants should catch a very bad one and have to stay at home for three days. Sounds as though we don't practice what we preach, doesn't it?

Now today, before I go on to anything else, I just want to clear up two or three points about this question of acid and alkaline foods. From some of your questions I'm afraid you have confused it a bit with hyperacidity of the stomach and other abnormal conditions like that. Now all such difficulties need to be talked over face to face with a regular physician. Even if I were a doctor I wouldn't undertake to advise at this long distance. But perhaps these facts about nutrition chemistry will be useful to you as background for what your doctor says.

The fluids in the stomach are normally acid. They even contain the very powerful hydrochloric acid, in a very dilute solution of course, not in the concentrated form you see in a bottle on the chemist's shelf. The presence of this acid explains why milk and foods like that curdle as soon as they are mixed with the fluids of the stomach.

Now eating citrus fruits and other tart foods may increase the acidity of the stomach for a short time, but that does no harm. For when these sour-tasting foods are fully digested they yield substances that help to keep the fluids of the body as a whole alkaline. They leave an alkaline residue, as the chemists say, or help to build up the alkaline reserve. Now this alkaline reserve is one of the things that keeps us healthy. It helps to offset the acid products which are formed all the time in the body in the course of carrying on the life processes -- its metabolism, to use another of those five-dollar words of the nutrition specialists. And don't let anybody mislead you into thinking that the body can become really acid and you keep on living for any length of time. That's just physiologically impossible. But the wrong kind of diet or some abnormal condition can wear down your alkaline reserve, so that you haven't enough resistance when colds and other infections come along. And that is why you can help to ward off a cold by building up your alkaline reserve, or in other words eating a diet with lots of fruits and vegetables and other foods that have an alkaline reaction in the body.

(over)

Sometimes in cases of hyperacidity of the stomach, physicians advise cutting out all acid fruits for the time being. Please don't interpret anything I'm saying here about diet in general as contrary to those orders of your doctor.

To go back for a moment to that question of eating milk and acid foods at the same meal. Here's one of the questions that came to me in a letter. I'll read right from the letter: "Can such foods be eaten promiscuously? I mean, one kind directly following the other. I have never found," the letter goes on to say, "I have never found that it made any difference to me if I drank milk or ate a milk pudding after eating tomatoes or grapefruit or lemonade. But persons seeing me do this said that it was a dangerous thing to do." That's all from the letter.

No, I should say not dangerous, it might even be beneficial. In answering this letter, I referred as I did a moment ago to the acid normally present in the stomach and the way it curdles milk as the first process of digestion. Now, if you eat acid fruit and milk or some milk dish at the same meal a very fine curd is formed, which is really easier to digest than that formed by milk all by itself. In fact, one authority on child feeding even goes so far as to recommend adding lemon juice to milk to make it easier for babies to digest. So instead of its being a dangerous thing to eat acid fruits and milk together, it may be a beneficial thing.

And by the way, there's nothing in that idea either of not eating proteins and starches at the same meal, so far as really scientific nutrition research can discover. I sometimes think that this diet question is like a lot of others we're up against. We hunt for some complicated way out, and we pass by the simple commonsense ideas and strain after the freakish ones. Maybe the idea of a good well-balanced diet made up of a variety of common foods in season is just too simple. But we believe that it's the safest and sanest way to good health.

Well, I've talked much longer than I intended on this acid-alkaline side of the diet question. Vitamin D and cod-liver oil will have to wait until still another time. I hope that can be next Tuesday.

Anyway, Goodbye for this time.

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